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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON MINISTERIAL NOMINEES

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SUMMARY

1. SUMMARY: The stage is almost set for the formation of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's cabinet as forty ministerial nominees will learn their fate on Tuesday, July 24. The Senate adjourned Thursday night after screening 38 out of 40 candidates. They plan to reconvene Tuesday, July 24 for a hearing on the whole slate followed by an up or down vote. However, five of the candidates faced further investigation due to allegations they submitted forged documents certifying their required participation in the National Youth Service Corps. Two candidates, Tukar el-Sudi (Taraba) and Amadu Ahmed (Kaduna) were not screened on July 19 despite being listed on the schedule. Unfortunately, other than these few instances, the screening exercise was mostly for show including the allowance of several candidates to bow and take a seat with no questioning at all. Overall the process did not expose a majority of the nominees to challenging issue-based questions, making it difficult to assess their true competency. END SUMMARY

FIVE NOMINEES BEING INVESTIGATED

2. Five ministerial candidates faced further investigation due to allegations they submitted forged documents detailing their participation in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). After graduating from university, all Nigerians are required by law to serve one year in the NYSC before beginning their career. Unfortunately, people have been known to pay for fake documents to avoid serving and allow them to start their career sooner. Although the identities were not officially announced, it is believed that the following are among those being investigated: Emeka Okechukwu (Anambra), Adetokunbo Kayode (Ondo), Ibrahim Tukar el-Sudi (Plateau) and Adamu Ahmed (Kaduna) and one other unknown nominee. Senate Majority Leader, Teslim Kolawole Folarin (Oyo Central), stated that the NYSC would be contacted to verify the authenticity of the respective documents and the result of the investigation would be received by Monday, July 23, prior to the confirmation hearing scheduled for Tuesday, July 24.

TWO CANDIDATES DROPPED FROM SCREENING

3. At the commencement of the screenings on July 19, Senate

President, David Mark, announced that although seven names were scheduled to be screened that day, only five would actually be seen prior to adjourning. It is unclear why the two candidates, Tukar el-Sudi (Taraba) and Amadu Ahmed (Kaduna), remained unscreened, but it fuelled speculation that they may have been withdrawn from the list of nominees. El-Sudi is allegedly bogged down by a series of petitions against him forwarded by political leaders in Taraba. Opposition to Ahmed emanated from the Kaduna Forum, a pressure group that stated Ahmed had never been instrumental to the success of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and does not represent the interest of the people.

NOMINEES ALREADY SCREENED

¶4. The Senate completed screening of the following nominees: Abba Sayyadi Ruma (Katsina), Senator Akinlabi Olasunkunmi (Osun), Mrs. Grace Ekpiwhe (Delta), Aishatu Jibril Dukku (Gombe), John Ogar Odey (Cross River), Bode Augusto (Lagos), Mrs. Fidelia Akubata Njeze (Enugu), Aderemi Babalola (Oyo), Bagudu Hirse (Plateau), Halima Tayo Alao (Kwara), Gabriel Aduku (Kogi), Yayale Ahmed (Bauchi), Igwe Aja-Nwachukwu (Ebonyi), Godwin Abbey (Edo), Odein Ajumogobia (Rivers) and John Akpanudoedehe (Akwa-Ibom), Dr. Shamsudeen Usman (Kano); Senator Mohammed Sanusi Daggash (Borno), Chief Sarafa Tunji Isola (Ogun), Prince Adetokunbo Kayode - SAN (Ondo), Mrs Diezani Allison Madueke (Bayelsa), Emeka John Okechukwu (Anambra), Tijjani Yahaya Kaura (Zamfara), Ahmed Garba Bichi (Kano), Mohammed Ahmed Gusau (Sokoto), Abdulrahman Hassan Gimba (Niger).

NOMINEES SCREENED BUT NOT QUESTIONED

¶5. It came as a surprise that Ojo Maduekwe (Abia) was not asked a single question but told to take a bow and leave. When Maduekwe's name was first announced, he did not have the support of his local

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Senators. Initially, all three opposed his candidacy and submitted petitions against him. However, the situation was later resolved when Maduekwe met with the Senators and brought them into agreement about his nomination. Others who were granted the privilege of taking a bow without answering any questions included: the ANPP nominee from Plateau, Ibrahim Dasuki Nakande; the Benue nominee Michael Kaase Aondoakaa; and Dr. Jerry Agada. Although the other candidates screened on July 19 were questioned, none encountered challenging policy-based inquiries that would demonstrate their abilities.

SPECULATIONS ON PORTFOLIOS

¶6. Although still undecided, there is speculation about which portfolios will be assigned to the nominees. Chief Ojo Maduekwe, current national secretary of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who has been in the corridors of power since the Sani Abacha era and is familiar with both local and international politics, is thought to be assigned the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Dr. Usman Shamsudeen, a deputy governor with the central bank, having a vast knowledge of fiscal policies is likely to be responsible for the Finance Ministry. Yayale Ahmed, an astute administrator and immediate past head of the federal Civil Service will most likely run the Federal Capital Territory; while General Godwin Abbey (rtd), a former military administrator of Rivers State, could oversee the Defense Ministry. Finally, it is thought that Former President of the Nigeria Bar Association and a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Adetokunbo Kayode, is likely to be assigned the Justice Ministry despite the current investigations allegedly taking place against him.

COMMENT

¶7. COMMENT: If the current investigation into the NYSC certificates of five of the nominees reveals that they submitted fraudulent documents, disqualification is expected and the spotlight will be on the Senate as they decide how to proceed during the final

Confirmation Hearing scheduled for July 24. Though the Senate confirmation is meant to ensure the best possible candidates become Ministers, the screening process so far has leaned more towards show than substance. There has been little questioning on real issues, making it hard for observers to evaluate the caliber of nominees, some of whom are relative unknowns and others who are career politicians. END COMMENT.

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